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Book Review: Kentucky's Best: Fifty Years of Great Recipes

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Red Beans and Rice, Mirliton and Shrimp, Creole Tomato Salad, Creole Cream Cheese, Bread Pudding, and Cafe Brulot. Contributors include Sara Roahen, Michael Mizell-Nelson, Patricia Kennedy Livingston, Sharon Stallworth Nossiter, Cynthia LeJeune Nobles, Karen Trahan Leathem and Susan Tucker.

An introductory essay by Tucker, Nobles, Leathem, and Nossiter establishes themes that appear throughout the book, predominantly the idea that “many of the city’s most famous dishes evolved from a resourcefulness born of deprivation.” This easy adaptability helped New Orleans establish a unique local cuisine, beginning with Native American traditions that evolved as the city passed through French, Spanish, French again, and American hands. All the while the Africans and African-Americans who created much of the city’s culinary history reacted to these changes while incorporating contributions from New Orleans’ German, Sicilian, Mexican, and other populations.

Certain works, restaurants and figures reappear throughout the book’s fifteen articles. Lafcadio Hearn, in particular, looms large, as his 1885 *La Cuisine Creole* provides early recipes for some of these dishes as well as their histories. The 1901 *Picayune Creole Cook Book* and the Christian Woman’s Exchange’s 1885 *Creole Cookery Book* also serve as important sources, and will be valuable to anyone researching these topics in more depth.

As S. Frederick Starr mentions in his foreword, this “is assertively not a cookbook.” Not every chapter contains a recipe for its titular dish — even though “Oysters Rockefeller,” for example, contains four recipes for other historical oyster dishes. The chapters on Gumbo, Turtle Soup, and Sazerac, on the other hand, each contain several historical recipes as well as modern varieties.

Although the emphasis is on food, *New Orleans Cuisine* doubles as an alternative history of the city itself, one that focuses on the entrepreneurs, cooks and historians that have furthered the city’s culinary tradition rather than the nations and politicians who have governed it. This is an in-depth and original book that should provide the final word on, or at least clarify, some long-debated culinary issues. Its exacting detail and historical emphasis do not make for a quick or easy read, but a copious source list, bibliography, and well-developed index make it an invaluable reference source for anyone studying New Orleans or its cuisine.

Alan Smith

Socastee Library, Myrtle Beach SC

Allison-Lewis, Linda. *Kentucky’s Best: Fifty Years of Great Recipes*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8131-9215-4 \$19.95.

Kentucky’s Best: Fifty Years of Great Recipes is a superior cookbook generously detailing wonderfully unique to Kentucky recipes, Kentucky restaurants, legends, history, and tourist attractions. The recipes are excellently easy to understand and seem marvelously nutritious and delicious. The spectacular cookbook includes a contents page, acknowledgments, an introduction, ten chapters: “Appetizers,” “Breads and Rolls,” “Side Dishes,” “Main Dishes,” “Lunch and Teatime Favorites,” “Soups and Salads,” “Desserts,” “Derby Favorites,” “Holiday Favorites,” “Bluegrass Bounty,” and an accurate index.

Brilliant genius author Linda Allison-Lewis shares her grandparents ran a catering company. Her Uncle Vincent worked at The Grand in Mackinaw Island, Boca Raton’s five-star, five-diamond hotel, the French Lick Sheraton, and Orlando Walt Disney World. Linda Allison-Lewis was an appraiser of food in Texas. Kentucky is famous for unsurpassed thoroughbred horses, Bardstown and Loretto alcohol and beyond compare bourbon manufacturing, Daniel Boone, the Lincolns, Henry Clay, George Rogers, Clark, burgoo, Owensboro barbecue, and Kentucky fried chicken.

Two fantastic appetizers are bear cheese and strawberry butter. From “Breads and Rolls,” clean-up-the-garden bread utilizes the last vegetables from Linda Allison-Lewis’ garden. Depot’s flowerpot white bread is served in flowerpots at the Depot Restaurant in Glendale, KY. Excellent side dishes are pineapple au gratin and peanut squash custard. “Main Dishes” marvelously feature bleu cheese chicken with mushrooms, Kentucky-style fried chicken, layered sauerkraut and neffles. Lunch and teatime favorites are mushrooms on toast, portabella mushroom sandwiches, sweet potato salad, and baked luncheon fruit. “Soups and Salads” superbly reveal my favorite oysterchoke soup, wine fruit mold, red lettuce with creamy Dijon dressing, radicchio chiffonade, and my favorite broccoli salad. “Desserts” glitter with green tomato pie, margarita pie, richest butterscotch, pie, sweet potato chips, ranger cookies, and bavarian cream for fresh fruit. “Derby Favorites” captivate starring peach-caramel French toast, pumpkin waffles, oaks cheese grits, banana salad, chutney, Kentucky Colonel’s Burgoo, racehorse tarts, Kentucky whiskey cake, riverboat pecan pie, southern sweet potato pie, and sawdust pie. “Holiday Favorites” are dazzling depicting banana punch, zucchini bread, crabmeat and zucchini bread sandwiches, and my holiday asparagus casserole. “Bluegrass Bounty” charms describing peach butter, pear honey, tomato-apple chutney, and zucchini jam.

Linda Allison-Lewis enthrallingly elaborates on alluring Kentucky attractions. My Old Kentucky Home State Park in Bardstown, Kentucky delights with the Stephen Foster song “My Old Kentucky Home” written about Federal Hill mansion owned by a cousin of Foster’s. The mansion is in the state park. Whiskey cake is given during guides of the My Old Kentucky State Park showing the mansion, lands, and gardens. Famous is Kentucky Colonels’ burgoo. Burgoo is a well-known meal made of many meats cooked twenty-four hours and provided the day after the Kentucky derby by the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels at the yearly Derby barbeque on Wickland Estate in Bardstown, Kentucky. A worldly tale abounds of a snake going into the dish during nighttime. The old Tavern Talbott Tavern is as ancient as Kentucky. In 1797, President George Washington sent King Louis-Phillippe and his brothers to lodge at Talbott Tavern in Bardstown, Kentucky. Murals on the wall were shot at by Jesse James. George Patton, Queen Marie of Rumania, and Daniel Boone visited the tavern.

Pineapple Inn Bed and Breakfast in Georgetown, Kentucky impresses with antiques, a Kentucky Horse Park, a Horse Museum, Keeneland Race Course, and horse farms. The banana salad of the Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn of Owensboro Kentucky is wonderfully different and highly nutritious. The legendary Owensboro barbeque creates happy faces at Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn. Recipe instructions for country ham from Claudia Sander’s Dinner House of Shelbyville, Kentucky enchant readers. Kathryn’s Coordinating in Henderson, Kentucky is eminent for owner Kitty Ellis’ out of this world cochelle salad nurturing with fruit as high as three feet. The cochelle salad generously nourishes with apples, oranges, strawberries, lettuce, carrots, celery, bananas, pecans, tomatoes, mayonnaise, mustard, celery seed, and whipping cream. Shady Lane Bed and Breakfast Inn’s green fried tomatoes are heavenly. Terrific cheese wafers from Shaker Village of Pleasant entice.

Kentucky’s Best: Fifty Years of Great Recipes is one of the unmatched cookbooks offering a variety of delicious and highly nutritious Kentucky cuisine recipes while excellently presenting some of the top restaurants and attractions in the bluegrass state.

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